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INCREASED PRODUCTION THRU CONSERVATION AND PROPER LAND USE^{culture}

A radio talk by Ethan A. Norton, Soil Conservation Service, and Wallace L. Kadderly, Chief of Radio Service, broadcast in the Department of Agriculture's portion of the National Farm and Home Hour, Wednesday, March 25, 1942, over stations associated with the Blue Network.

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KADDERLY: The other day I heard someone say we ought to have selective service for farm land. E. A. Norton, of the Soil Conservation Service is going to develop that idea for us now.

Ethan, how would selective service for farmland work?

NORTON: By putting every acre to work producing what it will grow best. Drafting men into the armed forces is only part of the selective service system. The basic idea of it all, is to put men where they'll do the most good. Our industrial mobilization plans work the same way -- they put every shop and factory to doing a war job it's adapted to do. It all adds up to greater efficiency in war production. Farm production is war production too. It seems like common sense to apply the selective service principle to our farm lands.

KADDERLY: Now, are you suggesting that we draft farm land?

NORTON: Oh, no, Wallace, nothing like that. The farmers and ranchers have already enlisted. They're all signed up to produce Food-for-Freedom. We don't have to draft farm lands, even if it could be done. But farmers can step up their production and keep it up for the duration if they'll try a little selective service on their farms.

KADDERLY: I may be getting off the tract, but does that mean they ought to fill out questionnaires on every acre and then classify them as eligible for service or defer them, or something like that?

NORTON: Believe it or not, that's almost the right idea. An inventory of every piece of land on the farm to find out what it can do, what kind of treatment it needs, and so on would enable the farmer to figure out which is his best cropland, or pasture land, or woodland -- which land ought to be farmed on the contour, or terraced, or treated in some other way.

KADDERLY: Say, that sounds like the work you fellows have been doing for several years. Mapping farmland according to the type of soil, slope, erosion, and so on.

NORTON: Right! With the survey as a basis we sort out the various types of lands and classify them in the order of their suitability for cultivation or other farm use. Class One land is the best crop land. It can be cultivated without special handling. Class Two land is good cropland provided a few simple precautions like rotations or contour cultivation are used. Class 3 land needs very special treatment. But, there are lands on which more time and effort is spent than the product is worth. Such lands should be kept in grass or trees.

KADDERLY: That sounds a little complicated. Can the average farmer classify his land like that by himself?

NORTON: No, the average farmer can't do a very thorough job of classification. But he can put his farm on a sounder and more profitable basis by taking stock of his different lands -- getting his soils tested if he hasn't already -- and then putting his best cropland into crops, leaving his less productive land for other uses like pasture, hay, or woods.

KADDERLY: Put each field to work on its speciality.

NORTON: I'd rather not say each field -- fence lines are not always the best boundaries. Sometimes the upper part of a field ought to be in pasture, and the lower part cultivated. Or sometimes a man's best cropland may extend over into his pasture. Then, it pays to move the fence.

It all gets down to putting the land to its best use. You can grow good grass and hay on lots of land that won't produce good soybeans, or peanuts, or vegetables. But you can't grow good crops on land that won't produce grass.

KADDERLY: There's one point I'd like to clear up: If we take all our poorest lands out of cultivation, won't that reduce the crop acreage quite a bit?

NORTON: That's an important point. It will reduce acreage -- but not total production. Many acres which have been idle are being returned to production by application of conservation measures. There's a lot of plowable pasture, brush land, poorly drained land, and other land not in crops now that's suitable for cropping with conservation practices. And here's another thing to keep in mind. When the farmer takes his poorer lands out of cultivation, his yields naturally go up. With a few well-chosen conservation practices, drainage, fertilization and other measures, he can raise those yields still more -- even double. It has been done and is being done on thousands of farms.

KADDERLY: Yes, Dr. Bennett gave us some amazing examples last week of how conservation farming will increase yields.

NORTON: And when you add to those increased yields the increase output from using every acre on the farm for its most productive purpose -- boy! then you have something.

KADDERLY: That's right.. Every acre has a use. Even the gullies can produce hay or wildlife. An idle acre is like an idle factory. It means less food, less production.

KADDERLY: (Ad lib close)